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### THE VOICE

I can tell you. Thin ditches  
cut along tar roads in my  
country. And I watch ice form  
on greasy weeds. I hear a  
tin cup tapping on a pump  
outside my door. In the morning  
I boil an egg and sit in  
the kitchen. I drink black coffee  
and read the label of a  
peanut butter jar. I know  
it by heart. This morning I  
followed strawberries  
on the tablecloth with my  
finger. I can tell you this.

*Jirac Disslerov*

## LOS CERDOS

(Opusculum Pedagogum.  
-Wallace Stevens)

Los cerdos no son lirios  
ni delicados muslos rosas  
Tampoco tienen alas  
Pesan mas que los gatos  
No asustan a las moscas.

Los cerdos no son debiles  
juncos plumas de ganso o loro  
Los cerdos son ideas  
concretas son propositos  
perfectamente definidos.

Los cerdos tienen bajo  
nivel de vida y progresan  
Los cerdos asimilan  
toda sustancia si nutricia  
Agradecen las dadas los cerdos.

Los cerdos son pacificos  
ordenados y cautos  
Los cerdos no comentan  
las leyes ni discutan el futuro  
Los cerdos no son gallos.

Los cerdos se parecen  
a los cerdos no imitan  
a las sirenas o a los pajaros  
Los cerdos son conciencia  
cerda grunen no cantan.

Los cerdos son espejos.

## PIGS

(Opusculum Pedagogum.  
-Wallace Stevens)

Pigs are not lillies  
or roses or delicate thighs  
They do not have wings  
They weigh more than cats  
They do not frighten flies.

Pigs are not pushovers  
parrot feathers goose feathers Chinese junks  
Pigs are concrete  
ideas they are perfectly  
defined propositions.

Pigs maintain a low  
level of life and live on  
Pigs assimilate  
all nourishing things  
Gifts please all pigs.

Pigs are peaceful  
methodical and cautious  
Pigs do not comment  
on laws nor discuss the future  
Pigs are not roosters.

Pigs look like  
pigs they do not mimic  
mermaids or birds  
Pigs are conscientious  
swine they grunt they do not sing.

Pigs are mirrors.

*Cotter Smith*

Lazaro Santana was born in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in 1940 and is a graduate of the University of Madrid. His first book of poems was published in 1966, *El hilo no tiene fin* (The thread never ends), followed by *La Puntilla* (The Small Point) in 1967 and *Recordatorio USA* (USA Reminder) in 1971, which was the result of a year as visiting professor at Wesleyan University. This poem was taken from his most recent book, *Efemerides*, poems since 1972.



## Eunuch

Obares the Mede took me for a slave  
and had me gelded to please his friends.  
I was not a gift lightly received.  
By the age of twelve I knew more  
about love than any other art.  
My father would have wailed to see such skill.

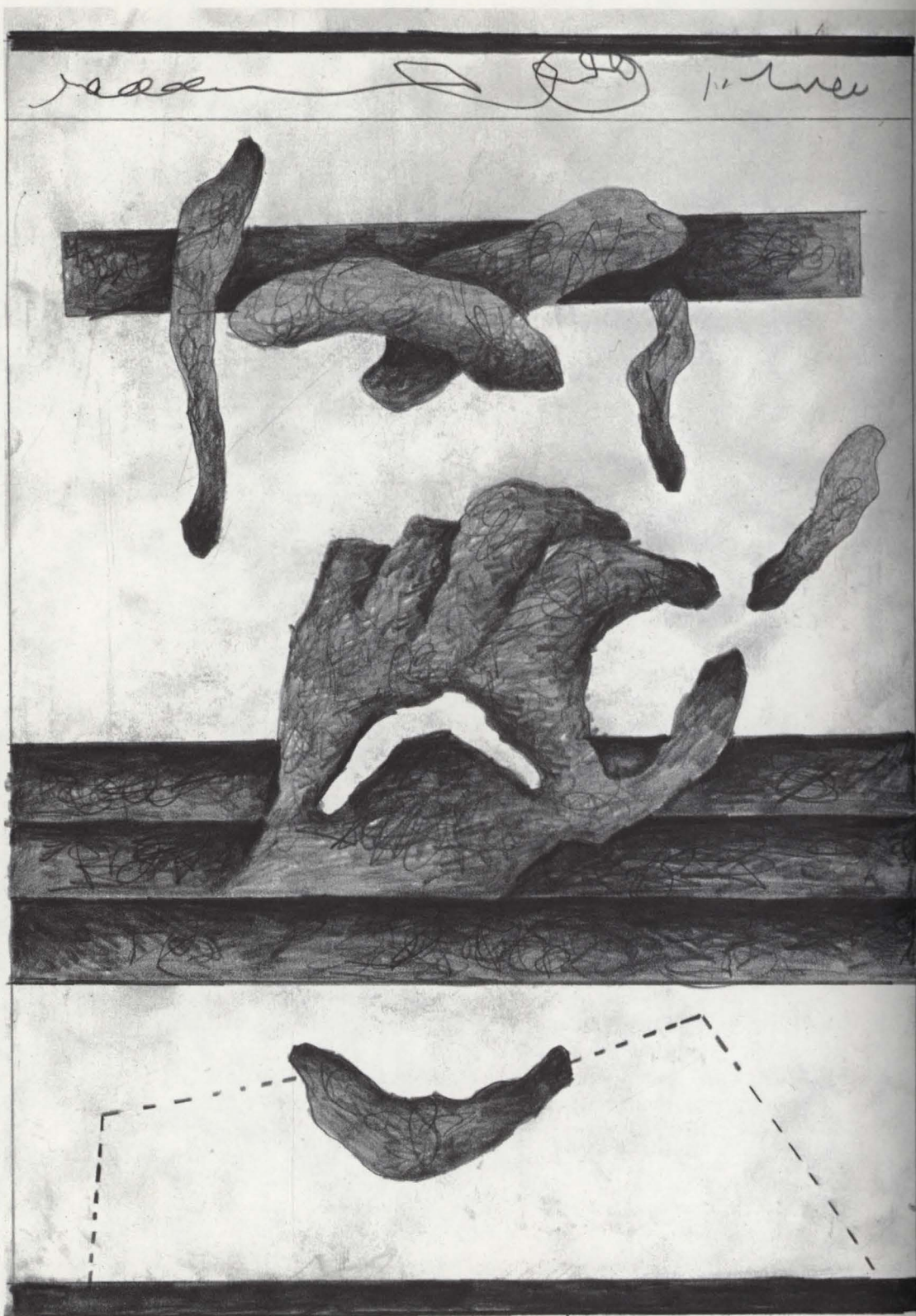
By the scented walls of Karmania  
they poled his head above the town.  
Without nose or ears it was not  
my father, but still at night I dream.  
Obares would not beat me and spoil my looks  
but I was denied music, and my pet bird he sold.

Lest you should suppose I am a nobody  
My father was Artembares  
son of Araxis, and we held our land  
since the tribe of Kyros ruled the sea.  
It was not easy, pleasing any man  
in another's bed, and those who brought friends  
would pay no more; they knew  
I am the last of my line.

But I would have you remember I was not  
born a slave, not did I sicken  
and grow breasts like a girl.  
In my thirtieth year I wear  
ten bracelets, two less only  
than the King's new boy.

My bed at night is scented, I can smell  
the ocean and see great ships  
glide for Tarus  
laden oily with spices,  
their masts as stiff as raw sharp wheat.

*Gigi Bradford*





## STUDY OF A REFLECTION

It is late and I cannot sleep. She is watching me. "Go away," I say. Her hands press against my window. Years ago, when sleep would not come, I would feel my dead grandparents sitting beside me on my bed, watching over me. Now it is Kim. I see her face in my window; short dark stringy hair, pointed chin, squinting eyes, skinny lips. My god, I think, what'll I do if she gets in? Kim knows.

I jump out of bed and run out of my room. When I reach the hallway, I catch myself, lean against the linen closet and tell myself that all I have seen is the reflection of branches on my window. I go back to bed.

Tel Aviv. December 1971. We sit rolling pine needles to resemble joints, stuffing pine needle powder into our pipes, getting ready for Kim. She enters the room.

"Oh, I had the best day!"

"Did you, Kim?" I say.

"Yes. I bought the prettiest dress. There's this shop, right across the street. Well, it's not exactly right across the street. But, oh, it's pink."

"The store?" David says.

"Nooo, the dress is pink. Seee?" Kim takes the dress out of the bag. Pink cloth embroidered with light blue and yellow.

"It's very nice," I say.

"I'm going to get shoes to match."

"Pink shoes?" Sarah says.

"Probably ballet slippers," David says.

"You guys, stop it," Kim says.

"Well what kind of shoes are you going to get?" I say.

"Light blue," Kim says.

"Ohhh," Sarah says.

"Stop that," Kim says.

We light a pine needle joint and ask Kim if she wants to smoke. She says, No, Welllll, Maybe, Yes, Okay, I Willll. We act stoned. David turns on the radio. An El-Al airlines commercial. I sit on the edge of my bed, trying to chew a stale matzoh. These are real good, I say, Does anybody want one? Kim says that she does. I watch her chew, spit the matzoh into her hand, and when she thinks no one is looking, she sticks it to the underside of the couch. Sarah asks Kim how she feels.

"Kim feels good," Kenny says as he strokes Kim's thigh, "Kim feels real good."

Kim moves away. "I feel the same," she says.

"Are you inhaling?" Sarah asks.

"I'm not sure," Kim says.

"Breathe deeply," Kenny says.

"Ohhh, now I feel high," Kim says. She shakes her head, eyes opened wide and says, "Ohhhhhh."

I laughed when I read the note. "The Family of Kimberly Joyce Dorison Thanks You for Your Kind Expression of Sympathy." My brother asked me, leaning over his piece of Morton's Chocolate Cream Pie, just what was so funny? I told him that I didn't know and he said, oh, and went back to his pie.

Jerusalem. Sarah and I walk around the new city. I buy a silver ring, she buys a menorah. The menorah has 'Jerusalem' engraved on it, in both English and Hebrew. We stop in a drugstore to buy some toothpaste and cigarettes.

"Toothpaste," I say to the woman behind the counter.

"Toothpaste?" She says.



"Toothpaste," I say. Behind me, Sarah mimes brushing her teeth.

"Ah," the woman says, "Meeshchat sheenayim."

"Yeah," I say.

"Colgate?" She says.

"Fine," I say, And some cigarettes and matches. Cigariot and gafrurim?" I say.

The woman nods.

We take a bus back to the hotel. People are carrying live chickens in shopping bags. It is Thursday. Tomorrow is Shabbat. They will kill and cook the chickens.

Sarah says that Kim is the ugliest girl she has ever seen. I say that Kim means well. And Israeli soldier taps Sarah's shoulder.

"Hey, girl, you are American?" He says.

"Yes," She says.

"Good. I like American. You want to go to discoteque tonight?"

"No," Sarah says. He walks on, toward the back of the bus.

I called Sarah, the day Kim died. "Did you hear about Kim?" I said.

"Shhh!" Sarah said, "It's not right to talk about her now."

"You know why she did it?"

"She took some pills."

"Not how, I want to know why."

"It's not right to talk about her now," Sarah said.

Jerusalem. The Old City. There are soldiers on the roofs of the building and on top of the walls. Their guns are waiting. I hold my breath. Venders pass me by.

"One postcard for a dollar. One postcard for a dollar. One postcard for a dollar," an Arab sings in three different voices and I am cold.

"One postcard for a dollar, girl. See how big?" The Arab says.

"No thank you," I say and walk away.

Sarah and Kim pray, by the Western Wall. I push through a tour group. An old woman stops me. She holds out her hand, asking for money.

"For what," I say. She answers, but I don't understand her words. She tries again. Something about the war. Sarah and Kim are beside me now.

"She wants money for war orphans," Kim says.

"She wants money for herself," Sarah says.

"Eet is for children," The woman says.

I put some change into her hand. She puts the change into her pocket, pushes her way through the crowd and reaching the wall, she stops the praying women, holding out her hand.

We stop in front of a Mosque, to warm our hands in the fire of an outdoor oven. Nearby, an Arab stands next to his camel, selling camel rides. Kim argues with him for awhile, then, agreeing on a price, is pushed onto the camel. She sits, smiling, I take her picture. The Arab walks the camel a little ways down a narrow street, Kim rocks between the camel's humps. I picture her dressed in a cowgirl outfit, being thrown back and forth wildly by a dimestore rocking horse. I laugh.

A Suicide Prevention Week Poster Contest in my elementary school. My mother buys me a big piece of orange oaktag. I decorate it with original drawings of daisies, in the four corners and instead of dots for the i's. "You Shouldn't Commit Sewerside," I write in thick blue magic marker letters. My teacher says that she is sure that I put a lot of work into the poster, but next time, I should be sure to use a dictionary. I lose.

Tel Aviv. A public high school. Sarah, Kim, Kenny, David and I stand in front of a large lecture hall, with about twenty other American students.



"What questions do you have about our country?" Kenny asks.

"Have you been to Disneyland?" Someone says.

"Umn, no," He says.

"Do you know Esther Greenberg, she lives in New York?"

"Well," I say, "I don't think any of us know her; New York is pretty big."

"I know someone from New York." Another person calls.

"Maybe you have some questions about our government or labor unions?" David says.

"Why don't your bus driver's own their own autobus?"

"Umn, because bus companies own the buses and employ the drivers."

Silence. Then, "Do you drink Coke?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that you don't know Esther Greenberg. I took her to discoteque and she is a good dancer."

"No, we don't know her."

"Do you ski?"

"Some of us do."

"We have mountain for skiing, also, with snow."

"Well," Kim says, "How many of you study English? Come on raise your hands high." She twists one hand in the other. "I never know what to do with the hands," she says in Hebrew.

"You want to know what to do with the hands?" Someone calls, "Meet me at water fountain after this and I show you what to do with the hands. Okay?" Everyone laughs. Kim bites her lip, and looks like she is going to cry.

Kim is giving an oral report. She stands in front of our English class, rubbing one hand in the other, scratching her head.

"The book, reminds me, well not exactly the book, but the main character in the book, I, I, I, can't remember his name. Well," She coughs. "Well, he reminds me of this man that I met when I went to look at a college. I forget which one it was, a few weeks ago. And well, they have, the same kind of problems as the man in the, in, in, in the book." She coughs again. "Do you know what I mean?" She looks at the teacher.

"No, Kim, I don't. But I do have a question for you."

"Yes," Kim says, rubbing her hands together and biting her upper lip.

"Did you read the book?"

"Of, of, of, course I read the book. I read the boooook," Kim coughs. "I did." She scratches her head, she rolls one hand in the other; she chews on her lip. I feel her in my stomach. Everyone in the room does. My hands are sweating, I rub them together. I want Kim to sit down. She continues.

Masada. It is raining. The cable car to the top of the mountain is broken and the black-topped walkway is too slippery. It is raining. We decide to walk up the snake path, a narrow ridge around the mountain. The higher we get, the narrower the path seems. I lean on David, David leans on Sarah, Sarah leans on Kenny and Kenny on Kim. My steps are not sure. It takes a long time to get to the top. We lean against a railing for a while and catch our breath. Many people are stuck on top of the mountain because of the broken cable car and because they are afraid to walk down. On Masada man killed man killed woman killed child, killed each other, killed themselves so that the enemy could not have that pleasure. Bare brown mud runs down the mountain. I hold tight to the railing, wiggling toes in wet leather boots.

Ceramic tile bathtubs still remain. I can see the Roman camp. I can feel them wondering what the Jews were doing up on that hill. I am an animal; they want me dead. Palaces and storage rooms, I shake my head, this place is amazing.



"It's very pretty in the sun," a short fat woman says.

"It must be," I say.

"My husband and I come each year. To Israel, that is. When New York weather gets too cool, about mid-October, usually, this year we left in November, you know? Al, my husband, he had trouble with his teeth."

"Oh," I say.

"Next week we're going to Miami. We stay at the Hilton. When we're in Israel, that is. The Tel Aviv Hilton, up north, do you know it?"

"Yes," I say, "We just came from Tel Aviv."

"How nice," she says. "The Tel Aviv Hilton has a beautiful pool. But the weather just hasn't been nice. 'Not beach weather,' I said to my husband this morning. So we hired a car and came here. I think its wonderful that Israel has things for people to do on rainy days. I mean, at home, you can go to a movie, but here, here you can see culture."

"Yes, it is amazing," I say.

"We do like the sun, though, I mean we like the sun, here. On Masada, you know? On the days when it gets too hot to sit at the pool, that's when I like to come here. The ceramic tiles just shine and shine. I wanted to go to Safed today, to look at those pictures that the artists do there, but Al, he wanted to come here. Well, we'll probably get sick. I hope the sun is shining tomorrow. I don't want to be sick when we get to Miami. A cold just lingers, there, you know, the dampness," she says.

I walk away. Kim is giving a history lesson to some children that she has found. "This is where Eleazar made his last stand," she says.

"Oh," they say.

"Yes, and the silence of self-sacrifice still envelopes Masada," she says.

"Oh," they say.

"Yes, and let's wander through the ruins, rooms full of silence. Now, take each other's hand. Don't get lost. Maybe we'll find your parents along the way," Kim says.

A month after Kim's death an article appears in the "What's Happening in Westchester" section of the local paper. SUICIDE, the article reads. "According to the County Coroner's Office, Miss Kimberly Joyce Dorison of 33 Elk Lane died, by her own hand, Miss Dorison, who was a senior at the newly constructed Moriston High School, is survived by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Dorison, a sister, Carolee, and three brothers, Samuel, Martin and Theodore.

Masada/Arad. The walk down the mountain is much worse than the walk up. It is hailing, now. Kim talks the whole way down. At the base of Masada, there is a cafeteria. We have some hot soup and tea. I ask Kim how to say bathroom in Hebrew. Beit Shimush, she says. The cafeteria is noisy.

"Come again?" I say.

"BEIT SHIMUSH," she says. The people at the tables around us smile.

That night, we stay in a motel in Arad. The roads are almost washed out and we are the last bus to get through. The desert is mud. The motel is freezing. I want to take a hot shower, but there are no real showers, only drains in the floor of the bathroom, and a mop. I try to sleep, leaving my boots near the heater, hoping they will dry by morning. At four, I wake up shivering, it is still dark and the phone is ringing.

"They turned off the heat," Kim says.

"Call the office," I say.

"I did and they said, they said, that they didn't"

"Well, then tell them that their heating system doesn't work."

"I did. And do you know what they said that there was nothing wrong with their heating system."



"So?"

"So, I'm cold."

"Kim, look, I'm very tired. Put your coat on and go back to sleep." In the morning, I eat hot cereal. My boots are still wet.

I sit at Kim's kitchen table. She shows me some sketches of trees.

"They're very nice," I say. For a five year old I think.

"My mother, is, is going to get an art critic to look at them. I think I have talent. My art teacher told me so," Kim says.

"Really?" I say. Mrs. Dorison hands me a cookie.

"Yes, we are quite proud of the progress Kimberly is making," she says.

"My art teacher says, she says, that it was because of my breakdown that my, my talent came out. Did I tell you that I had a breakdown? In Israel, this summer. I worked on a kibbutz. They made me cut bread in the corner of the bakery. All day long, I sliced Chalah. I've told you this before, haven't I?" She mashes a cookie in her hand.

"Yes, you told me, last week."

"Then why didn't you stop me, just now. You know it's not an easy thing to talk about."

"Elaine, didn't want to seem rude, dear," Mrs. Dorison says.

"Well, I forgive you. Anyway, my art teacher said that after a breakdown, sometimes hidden talents come out. I'm smart, you know. I have to stay in therapy, this year. But next year, next year I'm going to Radcliffe. Mr brother's at Harvard, you know?"

"Yes, I know."

El Al Airlines. The movie is awful. "The Secret Life of Sherlock Holmes," and I rent earphones, but just can't seem to find the English station. We are tired and spend the last of our money on mixed drinks.

"I feel high, again," Kim says.

"No, you just feel high," David says.

"Noooooh, you remember the other time?" Kim says.

"Yeah, I remember it," I say. Kenny chokes on his drink.

"What's so funny?" Kim says.

"Pine needles?" Sarah says.

"Pine needles?" Kim says.

"Yeah, you smoked pine needles," David says.

"I did?" Kim says.

"Yeah," I say. We all laugh.

Israel Reunion. Saturday morning services and brunch. It is a month since I have seen Kim's trees. I sit with Sarah. We eat egg salad sandwiches and tuna and talk about what we've been doing since the end of summer. Kim asks if she can sit with us. We say fine, she sits, we eat, Kim starts to sing. Shabat Sholom. Sabbath Peace. Over and over again. Loudly and softly. Off-key in a high-pitched whining voice. Shabat Sholom. Shabat Sholom. Shabat, Shabat, Shabat, Shabat Sholom.

Yes, the trees shape her head in my window. Greasy hair, hanging skinny branches, they make noise as they move across the telephone wires. The quiet of the darkness is broken by the high-pitched whine. And now, as I try to fall asleep, my grandparents do not come to pat my head and rock me, instead, Kim sings to me. Shabat Sholom. Sabbath Peace. I know.

*Meri Adler*





## IN WIND

the beaches change shape and people  
walk quickly against their faces  
is there a current that carries  
is there a strong boat still to weather  
the shift and ripple the  
shift

now that we are out of the wind  
i am sorry i never tried to sail  
perhaps i wouldve  
resorted to drinking ocean water  
to eating my own arm in the liferaft.  
you suggest this to me  
each time we compromise

our kitchen is a calm pocket  
we talk the way we salt our food  
in quick turns, like reflex

the cost of making such a space:  
little signals i have had to memorize:  
how you hold your fork when  
you are angry  
the set of your shoulders  
in a forced laugh

we thought we had no time to think  
we bit a cave in the sea wall  
and crawled into

you keep telling me how  
horrible it still  
is out there  
and instead of getting up to look  
we make each other afraid

i have sand in my mouth

i have nightmares of the storm  
being over a long  
time ago

of search parties given us up

*Carol Edelstein*

### **In Spain There is a Widow**

In the evening she closes her eyes  
and steps backward  
all the way down the aisle  
swearing by her humpback  
and muttering miracles through her veil  
as though she has little birds in her head.

At the feet of the girl-saint  
her bones release her;  
she kneels,  
hushed,  
knowing only the smile  
that washes the light between them.

Outside, the glitter and punch  
of concrete feet assembling disappear  
as she presses through;  
cobble walls wind around her like the arms  
of sisters telling secrets. She comes

to where she's been before;  
to the little wartstone faces  
that carve out the darkness  
and whisper to her in a language  
only widows understand:

Unbend your back, Inmaculada,  
give us your hand,  
lean your ear to our lips  
and listen—

a woman is bathing  
field after field her body unfolds  
smooth eager  
breathing her lungs  
wide open  
sky blue  
again

*Nina Clark*



## In Lost Houses Under Pine Trees

My daughter is up at dawn  
long before I am,  
calling on the telephone for Kit  
to play under the great pine tree in our yard.  
They pile needles into a house,  
pine cones their clothes.  
When I look from the window  
the sky seems an aisle leading into heaven,  
clear blue and their bodies  
in shade under balanced branches.  
Lucent clouds lift their voices,  
their anger so tiny it is all veins  
carried by wind into bluegrass  
and the rising land that ripples with sunlight.  
The smell of coffee heats the morning  
and they see me at the window watching them  
and call me  
and I go out and put my arms around a smile  
that says I will never die.  
See, this pine cone is a child  
that has fallen from the tree  
and I, its mother.  
This a house, cradle, and song,  
the wind of morning with sleep in its corners.  
Suddenly I come out of a dream  
remembering the distances  
of sleep and love.

On the hillside beyond swamp and maples  
an old man is putting apples in baskets  
and the orchard smells of cider.  
The earth turns an arc across the sky  
as she and her friend turn under the pine  
carrying clothes into adulthood  
in the neighborhood of sunlight.  
Your childhood alone.  
Yes,  
because this is everything,  
your play in morning with your friend  
in the mouths of vanished  
alphabets from which we speak,  
your arms holding the empty  
cipher of your halting speech,  
yes,  
because you keep the company of laughter  
sharing the wishbone of your eyes in sisterhood,  
I want to hold you from the luminous dust  
that whirls over hills  
and sloughed skins of bears that blanket the night.

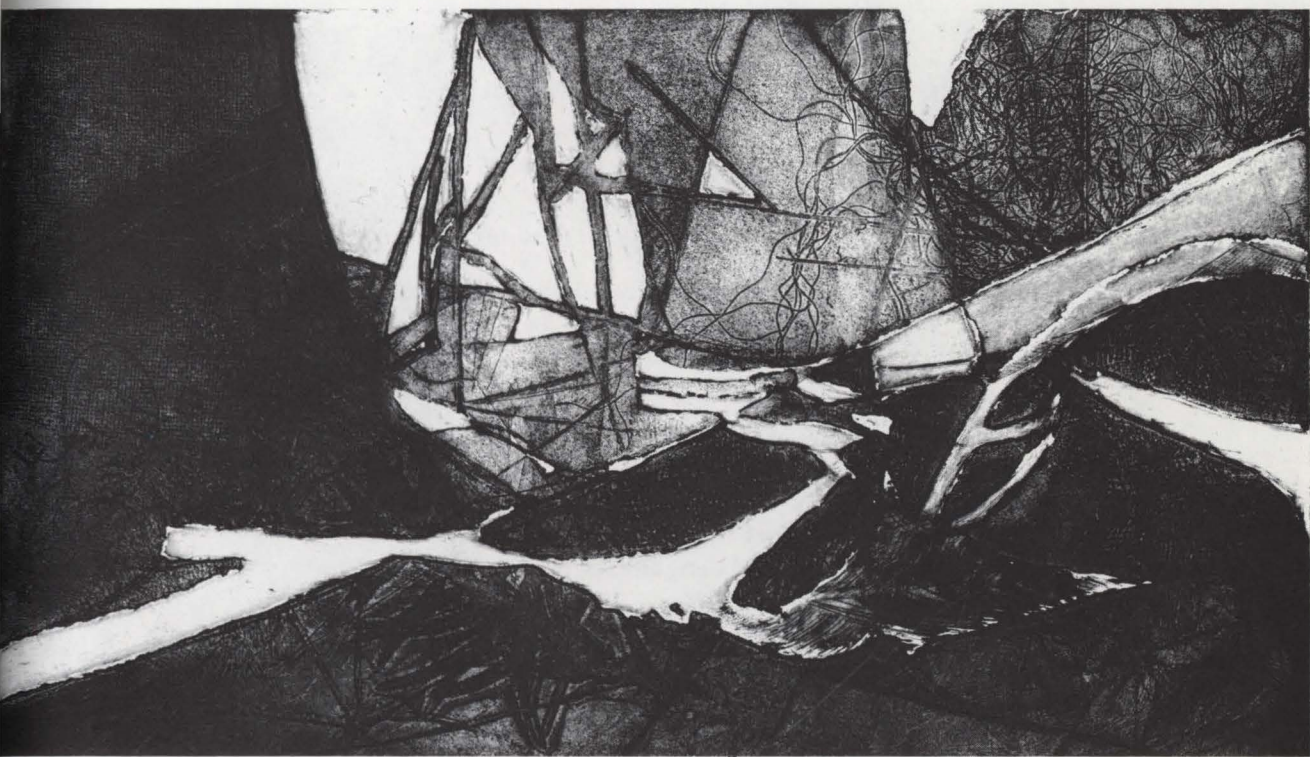
And you yourself  
on some undreamed of day  
at the end of childhood  
will come out of your house into dark stones  
with December around you,  
wind speaking your name in the white trees  
and leaves struggling to rise into a vanished sky,  
you will walk into the arms of someone  
who cares  
as if the stones of the field opened  
into a ghost-bloom of starlight,  
his flesh in your hands,  
and know the love that comes from dying.

And perhaps you too will go  
into a leaning house on the Herengracht of Amsterdam  
and look out a glazed window at beech trees  
shading the canal in lamplight  
and someone you love will bring you  
bread and cheese and wine  
in the aroma of a bell on a musty evening,  
and if you think, then,  
that you too are a father or mother  
and that you can keep him from falling  
asleep in his bones,  
remember,  
as you turn away  
from the street sounds to kiss him  
where the stones have fallen into history  
and you think to love endears even the reach  
of these shadows,  
remember to touch the distances of time  
and under the tongue to hear the laughter  
of the boughs you played under,  
and to bless the words, the lips, of everything here  
this moment, this sanctuary,  
of everything that lives in childhood.

You make houses under the pine your reality  
and your voices carry morning away.  
I can see in your shapes  
hands that once waved in my mother's eyes,  
the clear longing of a wash on Monday  
that cleaned all mortal things.  
Oh little tufted-haired, earth covered cherub  
in your spruce, sycamore, and cradle of pine needles,  
your eyes close upon mine  
and in mine  
down the path in the valley where we walk together  
and I would cover your shoulders  
with a constellation of song.

*Hugh Ogden*





## Intrusion

- I I squat on a log, grass wrapped, roots furled in bark.  
I hack at the moss, scrape and roll it back  
and in the space between maple and moss  
salamanders cringe.

The air stirs in lightning  
like a cave ceiling covered by bats, four deep  
aroused by a beam.

I dig my toe into the log  
and sculpt nightmares out of pulp  
and feel static brushing my toe and my leg turn to wood.

- II On August nights my father taught me the stars  
hunched over navy charts he marked the constellations.  
Hushed still in my bed behind curtains  
I saw Orion march across the Northern skies.

The night whirled,  
I smudged my nose to the pane,  
my faint breaths frosted the glass,  
and I began to chisel the lines of the stars;  
Orion with his sword dangling, bow arching in restraint.

My finger carved without control triangles,  
circles widening around a thumbprint,  
and the sliced groans of silence  
like the cold blue frowns on china.

I heard slate tinkling as the patterns burned through glass.

I slept and reawoke  
the arrow tip was the sole dispersal of light.  
I startled, bucked up in bed, the blaze  
wound itself up, and intensified with a hum.

The gloom of night, the pane  
both things altered, hapless  
still wring in recollection.



III I dream of fields bristling in goldenrod,  
and sense the sound of tunnels underground.  
There is a cave up ahead, I have been there many times.

I shimmy down a shaft  
and clench my light in my teeth.  
I pick up shale and taste its mottled color.  
Here sometimes there is a darkness beyond fear.

I enter a cave bending low.  
There are thousands of bats clinging.

I crack my flame  
the bats screech  
their ears prick  
their rabid teeth glint in my light.

Thousands of bats hurtle at my nose  
gash into my scalp and rip out hair and blood.  
I hear in my mind the pop of each root unclenching.

IV I lurch from the log trudging on one leg,  
with thick chunks of maple for ankles.  
In my tottering flickers light, ants gnaw.

*Bob Purcell*

### Water's Will

I see no reason a thought  
should not  
rise and swim  
the way the white foam  
that curdles on the water  
does.

rocks are placed that

water falls  
and crashes in the sun and sparkles,  
incoherently,  
and what we do is laugh:  
but think

that the water you see does not run,  
that each thick instant is frozen  
and will never come again—  
then you must swim:  
for swimming on a motionless summer

afternoon with  
only the sun  
and watching thoughts rise,  
you will learn to wait

on the rocks for them,  
and laugh,  
laugh:  
instants begin to sparkle.

*Clay Debevoise*



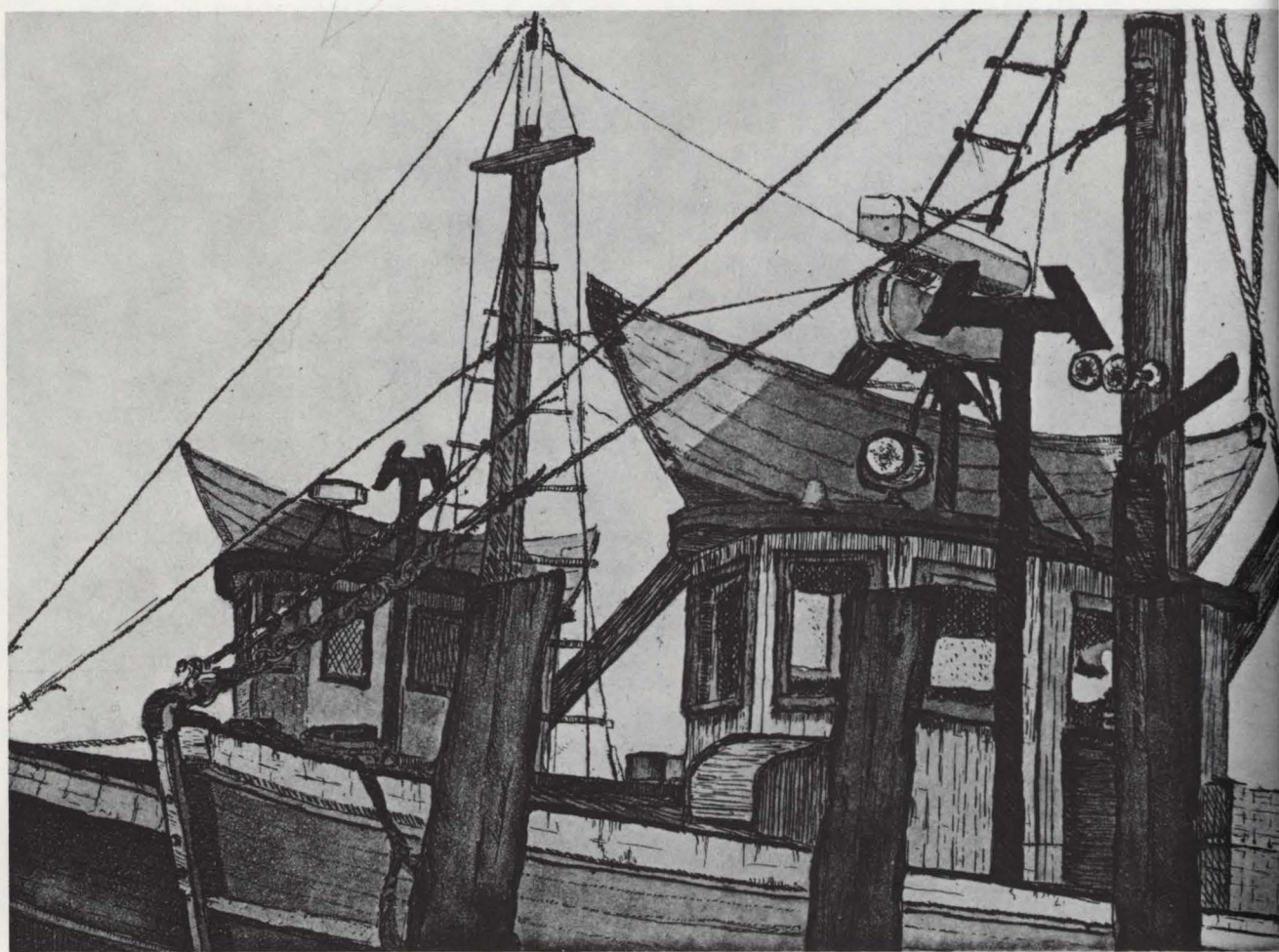
### **Too Long in the Terminal Ward**

Somehow we feel we ought  
to keep the dying company—  
be with them  
in the litter of tubes  
running in and out,  
finding that skin holds stench a long time.

I like to sit with grandfather  
who bevelled mirrors for ladies,  
who painted shining mercury  
on plated glass.  
He's polished so many years now,  
blankly staring into  
the clarity of his face.

My face polished  
I have come to keep company  
with grandfather  
in a room where silvered glass  
is the door.

*Betsy Breglio*





## Confessions of Wordless Symphonies and Bleeding Forget-Me-Nots

I am a whore of fate.

Capture the picture of the lovers on a 160 X 500 mm. zoom lens. Focus. She reaches out towards him, a slim arm with long painted fingernails slides around his neck, octopi. She rolls him over on top of her. Refocus gauge. Shot is slipping. Hand is sweating. Regrip the camera. He moves on top of her, straddling her, a cradle of affection. Her hair covers her face. One earring glitters in tynspring daylight. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot. The lovers wrestle on the ground. Enough. Shutter open. Shutter close. She stands. A long slim body that goes forever. I am lying on the rainsoaked earth taking the black and white shots looking up at her. Long slim legs. Shutter open. Shutter close. She glides one arm in the air towards him, helping him to his feet. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot.

Color me a confession of wordless symphonies. A schizothymia.

Yellow tinted filter fitted on the 58 mm. lens. I catch the reflection of the man and woman embracing by the church wall. Their lips are centered matching the focus circle. I kneel on the ground about four feet away. Focus. She lifts her right leg and stands on her toes. A double image shadow on the stone wall. Refocus. Shift the depth of field scale. Move the diaphragm ring. Check distance scale. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot.

In the room the prostitute advances towards her customer, pulling at his sleeve. He sits, chain smoking and rubbing his knee, oblivious to her calling. She glances towards the door anticipating her next client, anxiously avoiding my stare. She enjoys my studious gaze. A chilling thrill causes me to rub her hands through the man's crew cut hair. I lift the Pentax to my face and cover my thoughts, expressing my emotions through the camera eye. She smiles, shying away from the achromatic lens. The man covers his face with his purple stained hand, a gigantic strawberry birthmark, and lethargically rises from the gaudily flowered hotel lobby chair. The bottom of his pants is creased like an aging woman's flesh. Focus as they move towards the elevator to ascend. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot as she turns her head over her shoulder and grins.

The loves of my life have not complicated my existence, the uncertainty of them has. They are snapshots in the album of my mind. When they leave it is almost as if they did not exist. I focus in on a minute memory. Take the shot with memorable care. Finish. Develop. Enlarge. File.

Waking in the morning is habit. I stretch my heavy arms over my head and flex my toes like a frustrated modern dancer. Virgin morning daylight tears through the flowered curtains, leaving transparent stains on the ice blue walls. The white sheets lie at my side like a stiff body. Mornings are neurotic. Nights are nightmares. The tyrant of my being settles underneath my body grasping for my legs. Red stains groping at the pubic hairs between my legs. The hiss of a blown-out tire.

The camera lens moves down his body studying the slope from his neck to the bottom of his spine to the hairs on his buttocks. Feminine lines. Graceful. Too fine for a man. He pulls the blanket over his legs and swings his arms over his head. His face is large. An immense nostril nose situated between two blue eyes. Lines run, thin layers of blonded flesh, from the ends of his eyes to his cheeks and then another set on either side of his mouth. His lower lip protrudes. Move the camera up. Further. Towards the end of the bed. I am at the base. He, with his valleys and gorges and plains, is a human topographical map. Slowly focus in around his waist and hips, catching the bottom half of his face to just below the eyes. Clearer. Exact focus shot. He wriggles. Don't move. One minute. Still. Picasso-like thin lines to portray a fullness. Precision. Perspective. Check gauge. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot.

Anemic. Days seem bloodless. By mid-afternoon the sky has darkened, feigning night. My apartment is stark naked. Lines are clear and defined, a cynical linear movement from the studio bed to the flat glass coffee table to the pile of books on a piece of thick oiled driftwood. I have hung



a 15 foot by 15 foot mirror on one wall opposite the couch. My lines are curved out of proportion. The breasts are too large. The hips are concrete flesh that portray an unrefined solidarity.

The room is cluttered with glittery, camp, five and ten cent store decorations. Two women sit on a lover's seat with their arms around each other's shoulders. The heavier of the two presses her hand against the other's breast. One woman is black and fat, the flesh of her thighs rolls out from under the thin shift. Her large breasts flutter under the camera light. Her mouth twitches with excitement. The thinner woman is pale and short. She sandwiches her thigh between her lover's legs. She brushes her oily mouse brown locks against the other woman's tight black curls. Smile. They smirk. Focus. Their heads are framed by a series of family photographs hanging unsteadily on the wall. Move back into the next room. Outside in the city slum streets children are running from the spray of a forced open fire hydrant. A girl scout knocks on the apartment tenement door. Hold still. Focus. The lens slides over the figures, a transparent film. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot. The women kiss. Shutter open. Shutter close. The black woman caresses the white woman resting her head on the other's chest. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot.

Summer reminds me of the hot flashes of menopause. The glare of the light sends me into the tense heat, the reality. Tomorrows are like daydreams wrapped in multi-colored cellophane, an undeserving present from a friend that claws like a cat at your thigh in search of a lap. The mystical sprays and smells of the perfume tray cover my decay. The heat makes me sweat, revealing as in a seduction my secrets that lie hidden, fallow, during the winter. City streets are chaotic human pyramids. I rush through traffic, the terminal cancer of the heart, to the bar on 6th avenue.

The old woman sits on the Central Park bench between two white keepers. Her head is lowered staring between her legs between the weathered boards of the bench down into the summer heated cement. Lizard-like skin, peeling sockets of sallow flesh, hang like knots on a gnarled tree, a Bonsai tree. An old hat covers her balding head. Her large nose scents my stare. Her eyes, basset hound eyes, dark and dead, sink to her chin, her mouth awry, thick lips dried and cracked, turn into a corkscrew smile. Focus. The shot of the lens is directed at her black shoes lying stiff on the ground, apart, a lost femininity of an aging invalid. The nurse-like smiles of the uniformed white women uncover their fantasies. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot. The woman lifts her cane tapping it on the ground as in the preparation of an orchestra conductor on a music stand. The nurses lift their heavy weighted bottoms from the glare of the afternoon sun tanning their placid faces and hold onto either arm of the woman. Shutter open. Shutter close.

My Mother waters her plants bending her thick body in rhythm to a nondescript classical boogie banging through the intercom. Focus on the supple layers of cream flesh store bought in plastic tubes. She twists her dark curls in stylish curves net in hairspray. The nails are a polished burgundy. The mouth, an aging sensuous pink. Her movements are stiff, forced maturity. I focus on her elephantine leg bulging from the pink cotton pants. My Father sits in a leather reading chair behind the plants. Matron. Focus. His pipe hangs from his drooping mouth. His legs are crossed, his eyes shut. His lashes flutter. My Mother flaunts her security before me. She places her thick hand on my Father's neck, the seductress and the virgin. He winces. Focus. Shoot. Shutter open. Shutter close. Develop. Both of their eyes are closed.

My lover and my lover's lover. The three of us are having dinner at my apartment. I have painted my face white for the celebration. My lover is a film maker. His lover is his right hand man. A man. A fairy queen. The man lover holds his cigarette in his right hand, long finely shaped nails. He kisses the end rolling his tongue over the brown filter, each time he takes a drag. My lover stretches his arms over his head and then places a hand affectionately on each of our shoulders bringing us together. The man lover blows cigarette smoke in my face stinging my eyes. My eyes smart. Cleansing tears. My lover, our lover, kisses each of us on the cheek.

"Together." Sigh. "Yes. We are together." Focus on the sneer painted on his face. His pale blue eyes. That bland smile. The dark haired lover blows smoke rings. Focus on his hand slipping and



grabbing for my lover's leg under the table. I lean my dark head on my lover's shoulder. He sifts his thin hand through my hair.

"Is there a priority? Am I jealous? How would I act if he were a woman and not a man? Can I be jealous of another man?," My voice bellows, blurs, like an overfocused shot. My mouth is my camera aperture, my eyes the shutter.

"I am a woman of sorts. We are all women. We are all men." His voice is assured. He is scared. Frightened of me being a woman. A real woman. He is silicone. He quivers. He shudders. "Society attempts to place us in roles. When one cannot accept his limits and diverges from the mainstream of social and moral consciousness one is condemned as an outcast. His life may be the ideal of idealism in a democratic existence. Who are they anyway? These men and women who make the rules of the game? Boxed in closet gays. Suburbanites. What in the hell do they know of us? Us. We are the unfortunate bastards lining hospital walls waiting to be treated for objects caught up our asses and venereal infections. Heterosexuality is a disease. Normalcy is a curse, a psychic phobia for those who feel it is the only way to survive and make it."

"Homosexuality? Heterosexuality? Insipid men and women running around screaming be natural and love only one as they jump in and out of the garden patch of womanhood. I have full control. I can love both." My lover's voice comes from nowhere. I do not recognize it. Maybe this is a dream. Am I dreaming? Should I touch the heap of bones and flesh sitting next to me? Should I hold my hand over his mouth and feel the heat of his breath on my palm? It is foreign. I do not understand. I shake my head no. No.

There are a series of shots of a boy with a middle-aged lover on a couch. She fondles him. Her hair is gray. Her breasts sag. He is dark, Puerto Rican, and slim. His hands, thin and twisted around narrow child-like bones, play nervously in his lap. She bends her chest over his face. His look of disgust wards her off. She sheepishly turns and rolls her eyes for my camera. Shutter open. Shutter close. Her arms reach to fix her wavy hair, he pulls them down into her lap holding them rigid between his own fingers. They smile. She shifts her position on the couch nearer to him. He giggles. Shutter open. Shutter close. The saccharin flavor of love drifts into the room through the garish plastic blinds. They both wince at the brightness of the sun. Focus on her lips. Thin. A bit parted revealing two large broken front teeth and a bottom tooth that is a smoker's brown. The crease from her upper lip to the bottom of her nose is covered by a film of dark hair. Shutter open. Shutter close.

After dinner my lover and his lover pose for my eyes setting themselves on a stage with a black backdrop. His dark haired lover excuses himself and goes to the bathroom to comb his hair, long thick dark hair. My lover reaches for me as he watches his lover walk out of the room, closing his eyes at the sight of the man's smartly dressed rear end slip into the bathroom.

"Do you like him?"

"No."

"Can you understand why he is my lover?"

"No."

"Should the three of us sleep together tonight?"

"No."

"Ever?"

"No."

Two mongoloid children play on a swing in a camp for severely retarded children. Their uniforms are torn, their faces are dirty. They spell their names on my dress. T I M. B I L L. Their eyes are twisted, their hair in a crew cut with balding spots as if they had been whipped on the head. Scabs and crusty blood decorate their stumped, dwarfed legs. Focus on the child-like smile. The unbrushed teeth. The flat washed out noses. Focus on their hands held tightly around their waists. Overfocused. Turn them more towards the light. The camp director studies my body. I sense him inching his eyes from the bottom of my sandals to my calves, moving his large torso so he



can peer up into my thighs. The children continue to smile or is it a smirk. They are oblivious to my discomfort. My grasp on the camera is unsure, unsteady. It twists and slides in my hand. My palm is sweating. Focus. Shutter open. Shutter close. The camp director rests his body against the metal swing. The boys move closer together and begin playing a game with a plastic doll, throwing her back and forth. Shutter open. Shutter close. The camp director moves closer to me shuffling his feet in the dry dirt making it dance in front of my lens. I feel his onion breath pouring down my back. Nervously shutter open. Shutter close. Again shutter open. Shutter close. The mongoloid boys race towards the brick dormitory building knocking into each other on the way. Spastic jerking like motions. Awkward side to side shuffle steps. Street dancers. Slow motion. Stop. Shutter open. Shutter close. The camp director pulls me from my leaning position on the ground forcing me against his wet body. The damp hair on his chest scratches the lens. I push him away. No one hears my screams. He throws my camera on the ground and unzips my dress. I hear the tear down my back and the grating noise of his pants zipper. He leans on top of me. He grunts wildly. Forcing me back down on the summer playground earth, I squirm. The tears are refreshing. Their salt taste wets my parched mouth, they sting my perspiring face. I concentrate on the tears, ignoring the heaving of the camp director. He stands above me finished, towering over me staring between my legs. He closes his fly and walks, staggering towards his office door not looking back. His hands are clenched in a tight fist at his sides. I can feel the pull of his buttocks muscles tightening. His shirt is ripped at the sleeve. I lie there, on the playground dirt, for an hour or more. Shutter open. Shutter close. My eyes close. I feel a tug at my shoulder. The boy is kneeling by my head. He touches my hair and then my face. Nose. Ear. Mouth. Cheek. Lips. His eyes are blurry. He snuffles. His speech is a series of voiceless hiccups. I push him aside, insensitive to his tenderness, and run to my car. From two miles down the mountain road. Shutter release jammed.

My lover and my lover's lover sip their coffee before my mirror. Their hands, like interlocking intertwining poison ivy leaves, lie withered on their laps. My lover's smile, an aborted smile, shudders with the fantasy of his menage a trois. His tongue glides over his lips spraying the venom on the already moist surface. His lover darts his hand under his thigh. Focus on the frustrated closeness between the two. Settle the camera eye between the bridge of my nose and hand. Feel the perspiration loosening my grip on the camera arm. They cross and recross their legs. The image of their bodies reflected in the mirror, a Magritte surreal painting in black and white and muted yellow. Their stares bleached, forced. My lover cringes as I release the shutter.

"Nice shot?"

"Maybe."

"Are we a nice looking couple?"

"No."

"Why not? He has the same coloring that you do."

"You are both attractive. Perverted."

"We are sensitive."

The lover's lover rolls his index finger around the rim of the coffee cup. I want to tear it from his hand. To run to the kitchen and clean it with detergent, to rid it of his smell and touch. The sound of the coffee, the gulp seeping down his gullet, the slurp of his mouth against the edge of the cup. I pick at my fingernails and twist my rings.

"Sensitivity? What in the hell is that?"

"It's using all of your senses, sight, taste, smell, all of them and focusing them in one direction. Take for example drawing an apple. First you should feel it and smell it. Then close your eyes and imagine it. Stare at it. Pick up your pencil and draw first by memory and then by the reality of the fruit."

"Is that what you do in your relationships or do you only deal with yourself? Eat the apple because you're hungry and then draw it by rote?"

"Your questions are illogical. Sensitivity is not without conflict. Can't you stand the pressure?"



"Pressure I can take when it is unavoidable. This situation is absurd. A relationship, as I understand it to be, is like a play. First you have the introduction when the characters meet. Then the time, place, and period concerning their affair. The conflict and tension arises, the tragedy. And then eventually the denouement, a product of sorts. But something has come out of the damn thing. All you seem to be doing is flaunting your own insecurity and uncertainty concerning your sexuality in my face. What happened to civilized interaction? You've become a beast trying to shed himself of his winter fur. How long will this last? A month? Maybe two? Doesn't mutual masturbation become tiresome?"

"How is my relationship with my lover different from ours?" he says.

"You answer that."

People have begun to bore me. Their mannerisms are predictable. Their faces are all the same, blurred and fuzzy in afternoon rushes. The mirror is the god, the awesome truth. I am growing older. The lines in my face are distinct, a product of the middle-aged syndrome. The circles under my eyes which I used to paint on are now natural phenomena. Youth culture walks next to me in the street begging me to follow like a mesmerized child caught under the whimsy of a Pied Piper. Bleach your gray away. Operate on your sagging flesh. Exercise. Eat right. Shorten your skirts and give us your varicose veins so we can laugh in your face telling you to grow up and act your age. After you're past thirty you cannot pretend to be a teenager.

I sit in the bathroom alone afraid to turn on the light. The fascination of the toilet flushing. The sight of the toothbrush hanging alone. A towel thrown over the sink. The bar of soap unused. The tiles reserve no heat for the cold but seep into my feet, rising to my calves forcing the muscles to stiffen and cramp. I bend over folding and unfolding the extraneous stomach flesh. I touch my toes feeling the pain from the forced arch in my back. Nerves at the bottom of my spine revolting from the pressure.

I walk alone. Shutter open. Shutter close. Glossy. Reprint. I walk alone. Shutter open. Shutter close. Right foot. Left foot. Will the man that I meet next be walking alone tonight? Right foot. Left foot. The happiness of my life can be told as it wears down, as my feet sink deeper and deeper into the earth. I can feel the dirt encasing my body. I can smell the ground filling my mouth, forcing me to eat.

My lover's lover points to my book collection disgruntled at my choice. He mutters how my lover and I have nothing in common. My lover nods his head in agreement, coerced like a puppet on cloth strings. I dismiss them from my mind, condemned to harbour the memories of their visit. Their strut out the door, a syncopated beat to oblivion. Rage. Jealousy. Lies. I have developed their pictures and placed them on file burning the exposed film.

The young girl paces outside the apartment house lobby. She checks and rechecks her watch. She pulls at her midriff top and smooths her hand over her pants bottom. Focus. Use yellow filter. She runs her hand through her hair like a comb brushing it back from her face. Her nose is large. Her eyebrows thick and unattractive. She should use tweezers. Her thighs are heavy, exaggerated by the white pants. The unlighted lobby is contrasted by the stark summer daylight. He comes. The young man envelops her in an animalistic hug. She shrivels with delight oohing and aching for the janitor and desk clerk. Focus. Move closer. They notice my camera and smile. Shutter open. Shutter close. Arm in arm they walk down the steps, left foot, right foot into the street. I follow them. She glances over her shoulder and smiles again throwing her free arm in the air to her hair pulling it out of her face. Shutter open. Shutter close.

My camera is my eyeing mouth. I am fate's whore. I press the weight of the object into my chest, letting the lens rub against my shirt. It is me. My eyes are a zoom lens narrowing down reality to a finite detail grasping every grain and particle. I study the still life of faces, the contortions and undulations of the human body. I place it all in perspective gauging my range and the limits of my eye. Overfocused. Oftentimes I lose the shot, the control, and then must go back, refocus and shift. Shutter open. Shutter close. End of shot.

*Deborah Morris*



### Where The Black Dog's Been

We never questioned the rights of angels  
when, with zephyr fingers they played our hearts  
like harps, by the sea's side, our footsteps left  
for waves to grab and toos above pipers  
running from the noise of such pounding hearts  
that beat shores, and beat the smooth sides of ships  
zig-zagging up the ocean's damp-swelled belly,  
flagrant in the wind's face, and down again.

Caught in curves of canvas sails, I will glide  
out from harbors where fish fall like silver  
from hard beaks of seagulls that swoop and scream  
over fishing boats, rubbing sides and piers.  
Come, let me take you where waves will pulsate  
rhythms, and footsteps never leave the sea;  
Come, the sails are eager, full, and shudder,  
Come, we can sail through the open mouth sun.

Sightless, a tower sounds out the hours  
chopped in quarters, and calls it late evening  
when wind dies to whispers in darkened rooms  
and billows love-white sheets. He touches she.  
Like feathers, she touches back, the chimes still,  
room breathless, sea only the moon's mirror.  
They touch, back and forth, like pipers from surf.  
Come, let me take you where the black dog's been.

We never questioned the rights of angels  
when we walked barefoot on the sun-tanned sand  
where clams hid, buried fists beneath the tide;  
Open to pounding in shells and bodies,  
Come let me take you to the songless tune  
of ships dipping bows in shoreless waters,  
reefless in the fury of summer squalls.  
On the sea's great chest, come hear us breathing.

*K. Stewart Woodworth*



### For a Woman Taking off at last

Of course the two of you will be alone at that moment,  
there is no helping it. This is not a great moment,  
nor one that will test either one of you.  
There is no bravura in it, no sense of pride  
or challenge at having stood at the edge of a precipice  
for a long time to prove yourself superior to your own comforts.  
You did not choose that kind of courage, yet it is yours,  
like the precipice, ignored now for the sake of intimacy,  
and for the sake of intimacy, you will release  
the old secret from its fearful captivity where it lived  
like a blind creature in some damp cave  
You are tired of tending it: "Let it come up," you say,  
yet how many times did you imagine this scene,  
how many times did you dream this nightmare?  
Pictures of a woman slowly opening her blouse  
drift through your mind; her breasts  
are not there, instead, twin holes  
full of blood and green festerings confront her lover's eyes.  
Or, in removing her hat, she also lifts her scalp  
and shows the tumor in the head,  
fat and pulsing like a pregnant belly.  
Or, before going to bed,  
a woman unscrews her legs and lies still as a doll  
that when rocked, opens and closes her arms.

For years, your hidden handicap has been that abyss  
between you and the world, a sort of moat  
no handsome lover could swim across,  
let alone a careless friend.

Lone princess,  
now that the story is winding up,  
you want to run into those sensual pastures absolutely naked.  
Tonight, in this seaside motel,  
you face your man as though he were your judge,  
this same man who self-engrossed,  
still slightly dulled by the last meal,  
is not as strong as you nor as bright,  
and on whom now everything depends.

*Dori Katz*

**some are driven and some walk**

today i am riding the bus just to see you and you  
are sitting by the window waiting for me i see your  
head as this bus stops at the curb of your sidewalk and  
let me guess who is sneaking out the back door i  
want to meet him your husband your eight children are  
they sneaking out too just for me see this sleeping  
pill and the twenty like it right here do you see  
them in my hand as i enter your house listen i am  
threatening you i am threatening you with my own  
death and you are unimpressed look at my wrists  
see my arms tremble i am unhappy i am gracious  
i am tough minded see the scars on my wrists my name  
is steve when i was six years old i could fix a  
television set

(actually

as you read this

i am

thinking of metaphors

thinking of forests

or what about

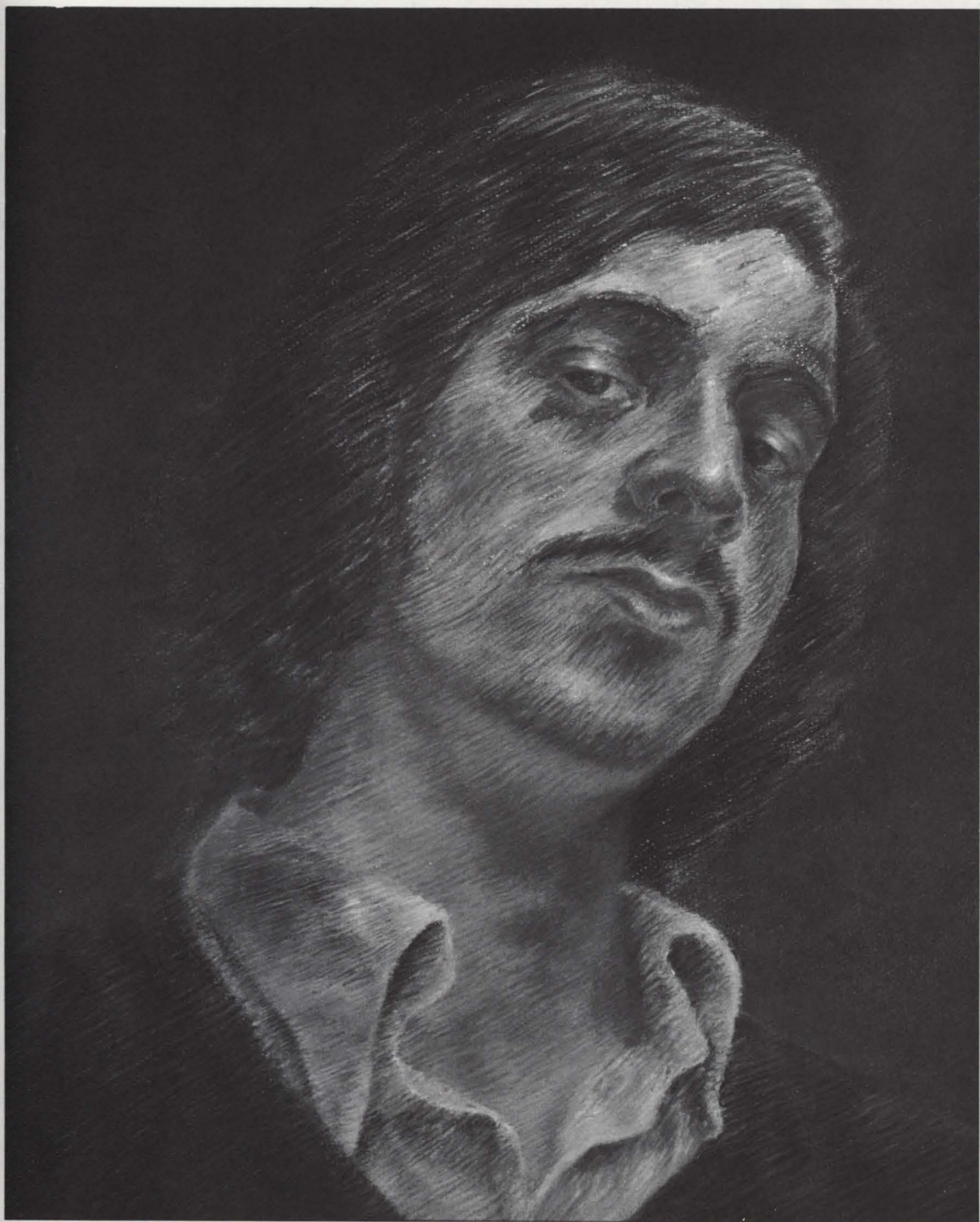
this

get naked and sit in a chair

find yourself and bring it here to me

*Steve Thomas*





## CHICAGO

Past Foster, on Milwaukee Avenue where it widens, amongst the shadows of the neon lights a sign says: Bill's Hot Dogs. A small joint the size of a large kitchen, divided by a counter, behind which Debbie stood. She worked three nights a week, the usual Monday-Wednesday-Friday routine. It was very busy for the middle of the week. Kids came in ever since ten. The men did not bother her as much as the boys from the high school. Most of them were little brothers of the people she grew up with. They didn't travel far from the Northwest side. Debbie's mother lived there all her life, growing up around the corner in a brick bungalow on Foster. It approached twelve and customers were still waiting.

For fifty cents Debbie gave them one dog with whatever they wanted, all or nothing and the peppers were the best. The place even served polish sausage and italian beef, but most customers came in for a dog and a can of pop. Serving one after another got pretty boring at times; yet she wanted to work after finishing high school. They could have sent her to College, but no, not after her brother died. Bill and her brother, Chuck, were best friends, even from before school. It was funny in a sense, because her mother and Bill's mother grew up together, staying best friends throughout. They never went far, no farther south than Lawrence and not one block east of Pulaski. Polish all the way, they stick together. And Debbie serving dogs for Bill, there was nowhere else to go.

"Just one more before you close?"

"Alright, want everything?"

"Sure do, with peppers."

He had just walked in as Debbie began to clean up. Her hands put the peppers between the dog and the bun. He slides two quarters over the counter and walked away. Time to close.

There was little for her to do. Bill was very good that way. He usually cleaned up in the morning. People didn't start coming in til 11:30 a.m. giving him plenty of time if he showed at 10:00 a.m. Debbie had to wipe the counter, pick up the papers, and then store the extras. The hours were nice because she had time to read during the day, just to sit down with a novel. In school she was good in English, always telling the others what to look for in the books. Her problem was writing. She liked to do it, but could never get the grammar. Her teacher helped her alot; and Debbie tried hard, improving despite the boredom of learning rules. Rules are to be broken is what her brother always said when he got into trouble. Debbie never asked where he learned that from, most probably a movie. Chuck used to go with Bill all the time. Together, like a girl and boy going steady, they sat in the same aisle every time. The sixty cent show at the Milford changed every week. And as Chuck always said — who could miss! Debbie was still a kid then, a real kid (tom boy) who drank in secret under the bleachers. Now, she had finished. Her hand reached for the phone after she closed the freezer. Dialing the seven numbers: 684-4477, she listened to the rings one, two, three, and before the fourth, click.

"Hello."

"Hi! I'm ready."

"How about fifteen minutes?"

"Fine." She hung up.

Debbie put on her coat, leather all the way down past the knee. Her purse was under the counter, lying open. In her wallet, she had several dollars. They'll go out for a drink. She did not like it when Bill paid for her in bars. Even though she went out with him other times, she wanted to pay in bars. She thought that after work is when she loves him the most, because they could go and stop as they chose. Her mother knew that she did not come until the next morning. And all was quiet acceptance. She turned off the light and the sign, letting in only the white from the arc lamps above. Debbie stepped out. The cold flushed up against her face; she turned and locked the door. As usual, she walked out to the curb to lean up against the lamp. The brown hair brushed on the shoulders of her jacket, while the warmth of her breath curled upwards against the dark sky.



Bill's mother, Vi, had left Ellen's around 11:00 that evening. They just sat and talked over coffee, as they have done since high school. Vi's husband, George, had gone out drinking with some of his friends; so she came over to visit Ellen. Ellen never thought of marriage after Mike — her husband — left. They never went far, always staying close and huddled, protecting the little corners that they could find. Mike and George, Ellen and Vi, Chuck and Bill, then Bill and Debbie; it remained intact. No one entered their world. Ellen did not allow it. After Vi left, she cleaned up, slowly washing the dishes and coffee cups, drying them and then putting them in little cupboards. Mike could not afford a house. When he left Ellen — pregnant with Debbie, the apartment was not that small. She went into her bedroom and undressed in front of the mirror, watching her body bulge with each motion. The years were visible, and they weren't easy ones either. She always told Debbie and Chuck that nothing in life comes easy. Ellen and Mike, the two together on nights that should never end, yet they did and so did Mike; her hard nothing finally left her alone. Alone and under the covers, she waited for Debbie, even though she knew it would be a while.

There were no objections to her daughter sleeping with a man before marriage. With Mike, Ellen used to make love on the beach. She remembered the waves breaking on the cement blocks over the sand. Ellen would come back at six or even later, only to meet her parents at breakfast. They fought with her sometimes, but they knew it could not be prevented. As Ellen would walk up to her room, she would hear her father curse at her in Polish. She could not sleep in an empty house; it was too much, especially when Debbie went out with Bill. Nothing could be done anymore, except to wait alone in bed. Tossing and turning and singing old songs did not work, for there had to be somebody, always somebody. Whether it was Mike, George, Chuck, Vi, and then Debbie or Bill, Ellen could not be alone and go to sleep. The voices and the memories would slip their way into her mind. She would call out to anyone of them, feeling the sensation of them coming alone or all together.

The four of them used to go out every Friday. George and Vi would pick up Mike at work, and then go over for Ellen. They had just gotten out of high school; it was summer and the nights were hot. The soldiers home from the war made the streets loud, and the bartenders careless — anybody could get a drink. Starting at the north end of Milwaukee Avenue, they drank and twirled their way to Pulaski. Mike always led Ellen into the Polka, shuffling and spinning on the wood plank floors. They laughed. Somehow they always lost each other, everybody dancing with somebody else. It usually ended with Ellen finding George. The two would hug tight and make their way into the crowd, trying to find Vi and Mike. George held her right up to the chest, pressing close and she always pressed back. One night they kissed in the shadows of a corner; nobody saw. They usually found Mike with a blonde at the bar, talking and smiling like a dandy from downtown. Vi was with anybody and everybody, dancing with one then the other, catching a sip of this and that; she always got a little drunk. After they found her, Ellen and Mike would go to the beach, while Vi and George had a spot off Foster.

Ellen burned as the tosses revived the memories, Monday-Wednesday-Friday — three long fires. When Debbie came in and shut the door to her room, all was well. Another night passed without a change, Debbie should never know of the fires. Ellen was pregnant with Chuck in the fifth month, starting to get fat. Mike went out and came home at six, without a smell of alcohol. She knew, but wouldn't say anything till he did. His first words were spoken three days later. That was the beginning, the start of it all. She remembered everything, never letting it travel beyond herself. It got to be a regular habit with Mike, at least three or four times a month. She could do nothing with the child coming. Alone until he came back, lying pregnant and crying, she could not decide what to do as the baby's kicks became harder and harder. It looked so nice to her, so happy in school going steady, so loose in front of them all. Mike, laughing and smiling, never let her down in public. All those jokes and dances and beers and nights, then Chuck. He had to work and help her. She could not slave unto him, even though she wanted to. There was something she



could not give up. Mike didn't you see! The argument was useless. He cheated and didn't stop, as if his will to hurt her was driven by the beating of the waves against the cement blocks. That didn't help either, for to him the past of what they were and what they could have been left a long time ago. In bed, it seemed like performing a duty or being forced to make a choice. Yes the choice, because he had the taste of someone else's apple; and she, whoever she was, wouldn't let him have it. Ellen let him have hers. So he took it and put it on the nightstand. Night after night, the apple sat there, turning brown and soft and mushy. It smelled, rotting away slowly. The only relief was to get up and feed Chuck, to quiet him down and offer the heated milk. Then to stand there, watching the small mouth suck with the unknowing touch of hunger, yes to want and be fed. She would return to Mike, asleep on his side, huddled up in the covers. The nights awake with the smell of a rotting apple core, Ellen watched the ceiling.

Mike finally did it to her in public, at a party. He had no right to slap her like that. All she did was joke about it. Nobody took her serious; nobody knew that he saw a girlfriend in a room over a bar at Wilson and Pulaski. He hit her for merely mentioning the fact that some husbands do more than look. It hurt and Ellen felt the blood rush into her cheek, coloring it bright and making it warm against the sting. George told Mike off in front of everybody. Until that point, something could have worked again, but not afterwards. So she would wait for Chuck to cry in the night, relief. The cries and the slap and the rotting on the ceiling every night, and Ellen's memory went on.

When Mike would go out to visit his girl, Ellen thought about calling over George. Mike's best friend sticking it to him, he deserved it that way. A phone call would do it; Vi would have no way of knowing. George wouldn't have to go far, just a couple of blocks, a ten minute walk. She sat wondering, turning it over and over, a phone call to George. She always remembered the kiss, and who cared about Vi as long as Mike got it? Revenge and an end to the smell as Chuck slept, Ellen thought she could if he would. He had began to move for the phone, and then pulled back. She thought again and waited and then went to bed, another night with the putrid apple stinking up the room.

It had to be done. Chuck stopped crying as the months moved on. She must stop it all. Ellen without Mike, there was no other way. He hit her with his fist for the first time during an argument. His short arm extending into her stomach left her breathless. She cried, lying on the floor as he walked out to see her. The air came back to her lungs slowly. She got to her feet and went into the child's room. Ellen had to go somewhere, anywhere. Only Vi entered her mind, and then George. The four of them happy as kids; and then four years later only two remained, at least Ellen thought George and Vi were two. She woke Chuck up and held him in her arms. She did not dress the child. In his pajamas, she cradled Chuck against her, protecting him as she walked the streets lit in white splotches by the arc lamps.

George answered the door. Ellen wondered where Vi was. He replied that she went out to visit a friend in the neighborhood. She walked into the living room, clutching Chuck.

"What's the matter?" His voice was calm.

She looked at him: his eyes moving from side to side as his hands rubbed together.

"Do you want to put Chuck on the couch in Bill's room?"

She nodded, leaving him standing over the coffee table. Ellen walked into the other room. The breathing of the two babies wove in and out of the air. She placed Chuck on the couch and then looked for a blanket. There was one in the closet, a quilt. Ellen wrapped her child in the cloth of grey and white patches. She walked out, closing the door as to allow a crack of light to come in.

Still standing, George waited for her. "Can I get you anything?"

"No George."

He sat down on the chair to the right of the table, watching her stand above the furniture.

"What's the matter Ellen?"

She walked around the other side of the table to the couch. Her eyes avoided his. "Mike."



"Where is he?"

She laughed in a quick rush of breath. "You want to know?"

He nodded.

"It's so stupid. I shouldn't hold back."

"Don't. Tell me."

She laughed again. "It's not a matter of telling you."

George stood up and looked at her, trying to force her to look back. "I don't understand."

"You sure?" Her eyes confronted his. "Vi's visiting a neighbor, huh?"

"That's right." He took a step closer. "She'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Just in the neighborhood, huh?"

"Right. Where is Mike?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, of course. Don't you want to tell?"

"Sure." Ellen paused. "I mean we have been friends since high school. There should be no secrets."

George smiled. "I was his best man."

"How could I forget? He was yours, right?"

He took another step. "That's it. You were there."

"I was."

"Mike went out, huh?"

She watched him come another step closer.

"To go drinking with the boys in the neighborhood?"

"He does it often."

"I know," George smiled.

"Did he tell you?"

He moved right up to her, placing his stomach in front of her face. She looked up only to see that same bent smile. His eyes moved quickly from side to side. George stepped around her legs and sat down next to her.

"Vi told me." He said.

That was the beginning — on a night long ago, coming back as Ellen waited for Debbie. George and Ellen in memory rolling over in the sheets, while Chuck slept so quiet. After Mike had left, Ellen found out, there was no doubt that George was the one, the one who came from work and came to her and came in and held her tight and made her warm. George was it and no one could know. Ellen never told him; it had begun, but where was the end? Flat on her back, Ellen lay alone in bed, looking at the ceiling.

\* \* \*

Debbie and Bill returned. They went to a place off Bryn Mawr, a small bar with red lights. The place had a two o'clock license so they were thrown out. They went straight back to Bill's apartment. He lived in a new building, a four story apartment house with twenty units. D-4 was his three tooms over Foster Avenue. Their clothes were scattered around the living room; and the record player was on — mellow jazz piano hanging in the air. In the bedroom, Debbie and Bill made love. To them, all became a warming peace between the long breaths taking in and sighing out. Slow, it all happened so slow after Chuck died. Bill returned a year afterwards and arranged a veterans loan to buy the hot dog stand. Debbie wanted a job. Bill began to take her out occasionally, just like a friend of her brother's. One night, they went up to his apartment to watch TV. He kissed her. They were both scared as if it shouldn't happen. The next week, they went out for a drink; and he kissed her goodbye. They went out again a few days later, for dinner and a movie. He took her back to his place. He undressed her; kissing all over her body, it happened that slow.

Debbie rolled over. They could hear the sound of the record, Bill Evans turning the music

inward into all that was there. They were there, breathing and listening. Debbie reached for the cigarettes. Her hand found the package on the nighstand and pulled out two. She lit them both, passing one over to Bill. The smoke swirled upwards towards the ceiling and both watched. Debbie put her other hand across his chest, twirling her fingers around in the hair. He was the first person who took her to bed. Debbie was not a virgin, but before it was on couches at dark parties, or standing up in a corner under the bleachers, or kneeling down for her first boyfriend after school in a washroom. Bill took her to bed. He had told her about some of the things he and Chuck did in Vietnam. How most of the times there were no beds, just floors behind the Saigon bars. And she remembers him telling her about the beer and the dope, and that they were so high. She watched him smoke his cigarette, while rubbing his chest and playing with the hairs between her fingers.

Bill turned to her, letting smoke out through his nostrills. He ran his other hand through her hair.

"When do you want to leave?"

She raised her head and looked at the darkness that fell on his face. "Tonight, I won't."

He took another drag. "It took you long enough."

"I know, but I didn't want to make it hard on her then. Now, I don't think it matters. She never says anything."

He kissed her forehead. "I think you are right."

"I think so too. I mean she never says anything."

"No, she doesn't."

He put out his cigarette. She took another puff. Together they watched the smoke come out of her mouth and float upwards. She found the ashtray and dropped hers in. He reached out and pulled her close to him. They were happy, next to each other and holding on as if all they could ever hope for would be in their arms. They never went far, because there wasn't far to go — just a few minutes walk and then a number of years, then it started all over again. They never heard the cries of Chuck, calling for Ellen and the milk, for the sounds died only to be buried in the surrounding night.

*Rick Hornung*



## Grace

my mind gossips like an old woman  
about the comb of your hair  
your porous nose  
pitiless, picky  
poking inside your clothes  
with a snicker, remembering  
some obscenity

you catch my eye  
enacting its dark judgment  
walk to me, offer  
your hand like a crank

I crank it  
full of grace, you think  
I am a lovely woman  
groomed for a stud like you

the old nag in me  
winnies and winnies

*Bonnie Bernstein*

## THE GREY GEESE (for Robert Penn Warren)

One night  
walking in the lot  
behind our house in Illinois  
watching as the blueberries  
faded to black specks among the leaves  
I stood in first dark  
and listened to the soft hooting  
of the grey geese.  
Looking up  
I could not see them through the clouds  
but could only imagine them  
their necks outthrust in lovely earnest  
sharp wings sculling the air  
that cleaved, effortless  
before the smooth beaks  
the cry multitudinous  
breaking the settled stillness  
of that evening.  
I wondered at the feeling inside me  
wondered at the long and beautiful figures  
that must have been streaming then  
above those clouds.  
It was a beauty they were not aware of  
and of which I was perhaps unworthy  
only their fading cries  
drifting northwards  
across my vision;  
it was the sound of starlight  
and of great distances.

*Paula Klein*



### Window

Standing on the door sill, she thought of two things:  
Inside and out.  
This world and that.

I step in.

I step out.

In is neither up nor down nor sideways

but runs straight through the plaster-cracks.

It also seams floor to ceiling.

Out

is when the angling roof

stands up in the morning and shouts.

Or where I go when I sleep.

Houses

are to keep the rain out there

and us humans in here

but remember that

this round brown penny-eye

is where the wind comes through

whoooooooooooo

*Liz Egloff*

## **STAFF**

Liz Egloff

Meredith Adler

B. K. Douglas

Deborah Morris

Ti'Maun Southworth

Ric Woodward

Katherine Woodworth



